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POLITICAL SCANDAL AND POLICY CREATION

A Thesis

Presented to the

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Keely Peterson

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on political scandal and its effect on public policy creation. Using evidence from the Watergate, Iran Contra, Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky scandal, this study investigates the combined factors of political scandal, media and public opinion. This study hypothesizes a positive relationship between these combined factors and policy creation. In order to test the hypothesized relationship minor scandals were used for comparison throughout the study. Also content analysis, LexisNexis, and publications such as *Congressional Quarterly* were also used to gather the necessary research. The research shows that four out of the three major scandals researched supported the hypothesized relationship. Therefore this study supports the hypothesized relationship, and suggests that political scandals, under certain circumstances, do aid in the creation of policy.

This study focuses on political scandal and how it affects public policy creation. Using evidence of scandals such as Watergate, this study will investigate the relationship between the combined factors of political scandal, media and public opinion. This study will pursue evidence that supports the perspective that political scandals do more than entertain, they aid in the creation of much needed public policy.

Furthermore, this study challenges the existing “no consequence theory” as discussed by John B. Thompson in *Political Scandals*. This theory states “beyond the entertainment value and the temporary inconvenience they cause, scandals have no lasting significance and tell us nothing of any enduring value about social and political life,” (Thompson 2000:234).

A policy implication of this study is the increased awareness of the effects, if any, that scandal and the media have on policymaking. Policymaking is not always purely rational nor is it “tidy and tight” (Kingdon 1995:222) Policy creation instead takes place in a “human and political world”, where factors such the media and political scandal could play a part in policy making (Irwin 2003:1). This study will contribute to the literature on this subject.

This study hypothesizes that in the presence of intense media attention and negative public opinion, a political scandal is likely to bring about policy change within one year of a scandal’s conclusion, therefore having a significant effect on the political world.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Communication Theories*

A large amount of the literature on political scandal is embedded in the literature about the media and theories about its effects on public opinion. McCombs and Estrata (1997) found that the media influences public opinion by “framing the picture.” Framing is described as a way in which a journalist processes information. A journalist frames an issue by selecting and characterizing facts based on their prior experience, or stereotypes. For example, during the Gulf War the media were preoccupied with reporting on military events and not on a diplomatic response to the crisis, which could lead the public to believe that the only valid option was military action (Iyengar 1994:168). McCombs and Estrata’s research concluded that the media tells the public what to think by framing the issues. Framing can also impact policy by suggesting who is responsible for a given problem or scandal. Therefore framing can suggest from whom the public should demand a solution or the creation of a policy.

Another communication theory that is important when studying media effects is symbiosis, or mutual exploitation. This theory states that there is a media-government relationship where both the government and media mutually benefit from the relationship. O’Hefferman (1994) found in his study of the Gulf War that the media and the government both benefited. The media, due to their live broadcasting of the war, received record ratings and in turn the government



received “public support and little criticism and investigation. ”(O’Hefferman, 1994:244). Therefore, O’Hefferman concluded that the public was entertained but not always informed. This study suggests the media’s “predilection for marketable information over critical information,” could lead to a decline of investigation and a rise in the misinformation surrounding an important national event such as war and political scandals (O’Herrernan 1994: 244).

Another communication theory is the two-step flow. This theory suggests that information does not always flow from the media to the individual. Instead this theory argues that there are other influences in addition to the media. For example Mortensen (1972) describes that information travels, “First from the mass media to strategic individuals known as opinion leaders and then from these people through a chain to less active individuals in society” (1972:347). The two-step flow theory suggests that individuals and opinion leader do not control what information the media presents but they can, to some extent, control its influence on the public and themselves.

### *Political Scandals and the Media*

The media’s effect on political scandals is a focus of much research. Sabato, Lichter, and Stencel (2000), throughout their study of the editorial decisions of the media’s coverage of scandals found that there should be a line that the media does not cross and that a “feeding frenzy,” or continuous media attention, did surround many recent political scandals. They state that without increased editorial standards and journalistic credibility, the media’s focus on

personal lives of politicians could continue to worsen the low voter turnout, distract the public from important policy debates and discourage the best politicians and the best journalists. They also state that the media's influence on private lives of politicians could cause the public to focus less on politicians' policy decisions or stances on critical issues.

Similarly, Ginsberg and Shefter (2002) suggest that the media, along with prosecutors and independent counsels, have become the new weapons of political conflict, replacing the Congress and the presidency. They hypothesize that these political weapons are negatively influencing the public's view and understanding of politics and could be creating a government that will be unable to govern.

### *Public Opinion and the Media*

The media's impact on public opinion is the subject of a growing number of books and articles that cite evidence of a scandal-driven media. Cappelle and Jamieson studied the effects of the framing of events that takes place in the press. They concluded that journalistic framing, which they refer to as "strategic framing," does promote cynicism throughout the citizenry. Cappelle and Jamieson (1997) discovered that the cynicism of the news media is being passed onto the American public, and therefore affecting politician's actions and reactions.

Jamieson and Walden (2003) also cite the media as affecting public opinion and also discuss how public opinion affects the media. While studying

the influence of the press on the public, they propose that instead of deciding on stories based on public interest, journalists should act as “the custodians of the facts” (Jamieson, Walden 2003:197). They suggest that journalists, for example, instead of focusing on who will win or lose an election, should instead inform the public on how the candidate will affect the lives of the public. They conclude that journalists must begin to hold their industry to a higher standard. This higher standard could for example affect the way in which scandals are reported to the public and affect the public’s opinion.

Overall the research on the media and its effect on public opinion agree that the media do affect public opinion. The degree to which they affect public opinion is what is arguable and is the reason for continued research.

### *Policy and the Media*

The body of research that links media and policymaking is wide-ranging. Doris A. Graber (1993) finds that one of the factors influencing media’s effects on policy creation is the context in which corruption takes place. For example, if a scandal takes place during an election, the media’s coverage of that scandal could be seen as propaganda. Graber cites the Watergate scandal and *The Washington Post* stories that broke news of the scandal as an example. It was only after the election took place that *The Washington Post* stories were seen as important. Graber also found in her research that the media’s influence is enhanced during times of social and political crisis and also when “rival institutions are weakened” (Graber 1993:27). Examples of this rivalry are the

battle between President Reagan and the Congress during the Iran-Contra Affair and also the impeachment battle between the Republican Congress and President Clinton.

Borquez (1993), looking to find the connection between news making and policy creation sites the “ecology of news” theory. This theory rejects the linear models of media influence “leading from newsgathering to publication to policy impact” (Borquez 1993:39). Borquez ‘s ecology of news theory states media influence stems from a “complex combinations of interactions” between government officials, journalists and policy actors (Borquez 1993:39). The interactions vary, as do the results of those interactions. Borquez suggests that this theory and the research previously performed on the “ecology of news” be integrated into policy research for further investigation of the complex relationship.

### *Political Scandals and Policy Creation*

*Political Scandal* written by John B. Thompson (2000), the most recent comprehensive study of political scandals, included a limited number of theories that address political scandal and its consequences. Thompson discussed the functionalist theory, which stated that political scandals can have important consequences but they only reaffirm the “norms, conventions and institutions, which constitute the social order,” (Thompson 2000:235). The second theory, the trivialization theory, discussed the impact that scandals have on the public’s view of politics. This theory proposed that the media, by becoming preoccupied

with a scandal, “undermines the quality of public discourse and debate,” which leads to an uninformed public (Thompson 2000:238). The third theory discussed by Thompson is the “subversion theory” which stated that scandals enrich the public by “calling into question the dominant norms of journalism and by turning the tables on the powerful and the privileged,” (Thompson 2000:242). Also, Thompson discussed the no-consequence theory, which stated that political scandal has no lasting significance on political or social life. This theory will be discussed further throughout this study. Thompson dismissed these theories and developed an alternative approach. The “social theory of scandal” theory argued that scandals are struggles over symbolic power in which reputation and trust are at stake.

Page and Shapiro (1983) researched the combined factors of political scandal and policy creation. Their research concluded that they could be “confident that public opinion, whatever its sources and quality, is a factor that genuinely affects government policies in the United States.” It can be assumed from the above-mentioned research that the public’s opinion of a political scandal could potentially affect the creation of a policy, although this study is not directly related to political scandal.

Mackenzie (2002) also focuses on linking political scandal and policy creation. Through an analysis of America’s effort to regulate ethical behavior Mackenzie sought to disprove the phrase “You can’t legislate ethics,” (Mackenzie 2002:172). His research showed that the effects of scandal on policy creation were positive because the scandals led to a higher standard of ethics.

An extensive amount of literature has been written analyzing the variables of political scandal, public opinion and media effects. The research shows that media affect public opinion, and that political scandal is also affected by the media and public opinion, but the analysis seems to end there. There is a lack of research on the subject of political scandal and its consequences. The research needs to continue and assess the policy creation that may or may not result from the political scandal.

The prior research discussed fails to incorporate all the variables included in this study. The study focuses on the relationships between media effects, public opinion and political scandal, and how these variables combined may or may not result in policy creation.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study suggests a positive relationship between a political scandal and policy creation. This positive relationship is dependent on a political scandal receiving intense media attention and provoking a negative public reaction. For the purposes of this study the relationship between the variables, political scandal, intense media attention, and negative public opinion is understood as multiplicative, which suggests that the above-mentioned variables when combined multiply or increase the effects of those variables. However, this study did not use quantitative data; instead a model has been proposed which will help illustrate the relationship between the variables.

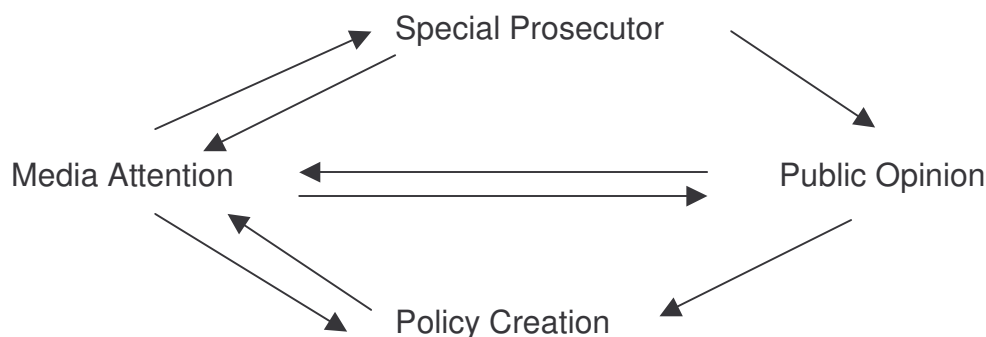
A political scandal is the independent variable, and policy creation is the dependent variable. For the purposes of this study a scandal is defined as an ethically or legally corrupt action performed by a national political figure or group of political figures. This corrupt action receives intense media attention, and some type of reaction from the public. The dependent variable policy is defined as legislation, court decisions, or regulations, which were changed or created within a year of the scandal's conclusion. The newly created policy must be directly related to the scandal.

The "no consequence theory" as discussed by John B. Thompson states "beyond the entertainment value and the temporary inconvenience they cause, scandals have no lasting significance and tell us nothing of any enduring value about social and political life" (Thompson 2000:234). In the presence of the above-mentioned variables this study opposes this theory and seeks to positively link a political scandal, which receives media attention and a reaction from the public, to the creation of policy, therefore showing that political scandal does have lasting significance.

The model for the relationship between the variables builds upon Borquez's "ecology of news" theory. This model also does not theorize a linear model of media influence. Instead, like Borquez's this model illustrates "complex combinations of interactions," (Borquez 1993:39). For example, one possible combination of interactions is that after a scandal takes place a special prosecutor is appointed. The scandal then becomes a focus of the media, and the public's opinion of the scandal and the president involved becomes negative.

As a result of this, a policy is created or changed. Another possibility is that the media coverage of a possible scandal becomes intense after which a special prosecutor is appointed. The public's opinion of the scandal begins to affect the president's approval rating and then a policy is created or changed. It is hypothesized that the relationship looks something like this model:

Figure 1 -- Model of the Hypothesized Relationship



## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### *Operational Definitions*

Major scandals that were included in this study were any presidential scandal after 1970 where the president played or was suspected of playing a part in the corrupt action. Also, another requirement was that this scandal involved the appointment of special prosecutors or independent counsel. Minor scandals that were included also took place after 1970 and were connected to the presidency but they did not necessarily involve the president. Special prosecutors or independent counsels were not appointed for the minor scandals.



The media content that was measured were three of the largest circulating national daily newspapers during the year the scandal took place. These newspapers were chosen because they were available on *LexisNexis*. Each newspaper's front-page stories that were related to a scandal were counted for the four months following the day the special prosecutor or independent counsel was appointed to investigate the scandal. Content analysis was also performed on the newspaper's front-page stories that were related to the scandal. This content analysis measured the intensity of the language used to discuss each scandal.

Public opinion was measured by researching The Gallup Organization's polls and measures of the president's job approval rating during the scandal. The Gallup poll archives were researched for relevant polls on issues such as the public's opinion of the scandal and how the scandal affected each president's overall approval rating. In order for the public opinion polls to be considered negative, the president's approval rating had to have fallen by at least ten percentage points.

The policies created, if any, were measured by researching the *CQ Weekly Reports* of the year following the scandal for legislation, court decisions or regulations that were created to counteract the scandal. Also books that focused on each presidential scandal were investigated.

## *Research Design*

This study was explanatory, as it attempted to understand the complex relationship between political scandal and policy creation.

The scandals with intense media attention that were researched were Watergate, Iran Contra, Whitewater and the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The media's attention and public opinion of the scandal, along with the policies that may have been created in reaction to the scandal, were what was being measured and observed. This research began the first day after the scandal was made public.

Media attention was measured by counting the number of times a story related to the scandal was on the front page of one of the three largest circulating national daily newspapers of the year the scandal took place. The newspaper's front page stories related to the scandal were counted for four months following the day the independent counsel or special prosecutor was appointed to the investigation of the scandal. Also, content analysis was also performed on the front-page stories for four months following the day the scandal was made public. This analysis searched for keywords that signified the intensity of the language used to discuss each scandal. The intensity of the language was measured in order to illustrate how serious the scandal was being taken by the media, other politicians and the public.

Minor scandals were also analyzed in the same manner as the major scandals. These less publicized scandals were used to compare the amount of media attention a highly publicized scandal received. These scandals were

needed to demonstrate the possible difference between the consequences of media coverage and intense media coverage.

Public opinion polls illustrated the impact of the media's attention on the president's overall approval rating. Finally, a list of the policies, if any, which were changed or created, was compiled. The results of this research are compared to the hypothesized model stated above in the conceptual framework.

### *Population and Sample*

The sample of this study was the presidential political scandals that took place after 1970, Watergate, Iran-Contra, Whitewater, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Political scandals were selected based on the previously mentioned definition of scandal. In this study the sample and the population were the same. Although there was potential for the generalizability of this study's findings, it should also be noted that the population size was small and limited, which could lessen the significance of this study's results.

### *Data Collection and Data Analysis*

The data that needed to be collected in order to research the variable scandal were found in various historical books. For example *Political Scandal in the USA*, by Robert Williams, and *The Clinton Scandals*, edited by Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, discuss political scandal in-depth. Various other historical references were also consulted.

The research tool *LexisNexis* and microfilm were used to locate and count the number of times the scandal and stories related to the scandal were placed on the front page of the largely circulated newspapers. The national daily newspapers' circulation rates used for this study were found in the *World Almanac Book of Facts*. Every year that a scandal took place the *World Almanac Book of Facts* was consulted for circulation rates. For the Watergate scandal and the Iran Contra scandal, the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* were counted. For the Whitewater scandal and the Monica Lewinsky scandal, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times* was counted. Different newspapers were consulted for each scandal because every year circulation rates differ.

Content analysis was also utilized in order to measure intense media attention. This analysis researched the front pages stories for four months following the day the scandal became public by analyzing each story for keywords, which would indicate intense language.

This study used less publicized scandals that were not "intensely" covered by the media in order to compare the media's attention to the four major presidential scandals that were researched throughout this study. The minor scandals that were researched included President Bush's pardoning of Caspar Weinberger, President Ford's pardoning of Richard Nixon, and the investigations of President Clinton's cabinet members Ron Brown and Henry Cisneros.

The key words and phrases that follow were used to identify the scandals:

Watergate: *Watergate, the plumbers, Gordon Liddy, Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP), John Dean, Ervin Committee, Houston Report, dirty tricks, enemies list, Archibald Cox, Woodward and Bernstein, Saturday Night Massacre*

Iran-Contra: *Contras, arms sales, Oliver North, Monchar Ghorbanifor, Shah of Iran, Arms for hostages, Boland Amendments, Lawrence Walsh, Tower Commission, Abu Nidal*

Whitewater: *Whitewater development corporation, James McDougal, Susan McDougal, James Lyons, The Lyons Report, Resolution Trust Corporation, L. Jean Lewis, Robert Finke, Banking Committee, Madison Savings & Loans, Kenneth Star, Vince Foster*

Monica Lewinsky: *Monica Lewinsky, Linda Tripp, vast right wing conspiracy, Kenneth Star, Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal*

The keywords for the content analysis to measure intensity are as follows: *impeachment, jail, indictment, constitutional issues, independent counsel, special prosecutor.*

Public opinion research was analyzed by collecting the Gallup Organization's polls on the president's job approval rating during the scandal. In order for this study to consider the public's opinion of the president as negative, the president's job approval rating had to of fallen ten or more percentage points, thus signifying a negative change in how the president is performing due to his perceived role in the scandal. These polls were accessed through the Gallup Poll Archives. The *CQ Weekly Reports* were analyzed for the year following the

scandal in order to collect data on the variable of policy. Also books that focus on each presidential scandal were investigated.

All the data that was required to perform this study were easily accessible, already published literature. Therefore, there were no ethical considerations that needed to be addressed.

### *Limitations*

Limitations for this study involved data collection, reliability, and validity. This study took into account only print media when measuring the variable media. Other forms of influential media such as television and radio were not analyzed, which is one reason why validity could be questioned. Also, the list of key words used for content analysis might be considered incomplete by another researcher, and therefore validity could be questioned. The reliability of the content analysis could be questioned because there was only one coder and only one analysis of the front-page stories. Although these weaknesses exist, the analysis that took place was as precise and accurate as possible. Access to data and extraneous factors did not pose a problem throughout this study.

## RESULTS and DATA ANALYSIS

### *Media Attention*

As discussed previously, the intensity of the media attention was measured in two ways. First it was measured by counting the number of times the major and minor scandals were referred to on the front page of the highly

circulated newspapers. Second, it was measured through content analysis, which looked for intense words throughout the front-page newspaper stories that were related to each scandal.

The results are illustrated in the graphs below:

FIGURE 2 – Major Scandal: Number of Times the Scandal was on the Front Page

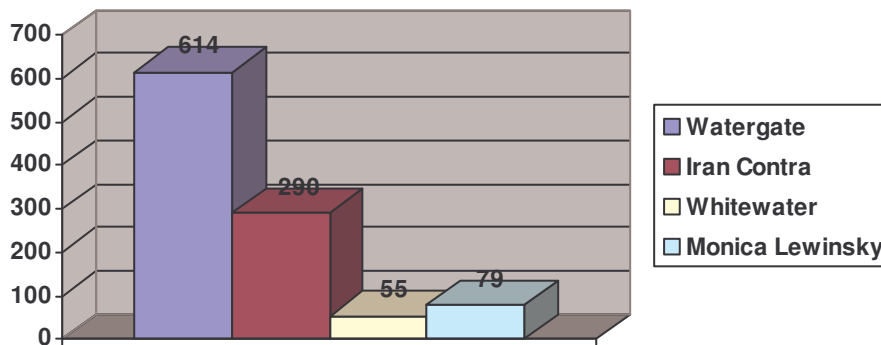


FIGURE 3 – Minor Scandal: Number of Times the Scandal was on the Front Page

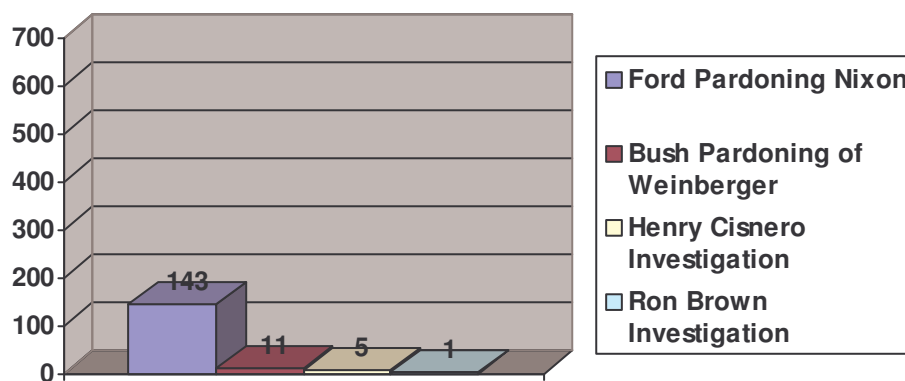


FIGURE 4 – Major Scandals: Intensity of Language

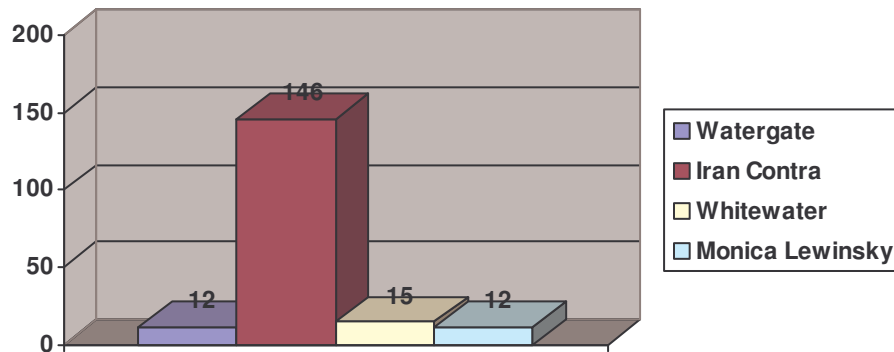


FIGURE 5 – Minor Scandals Intensity of Language

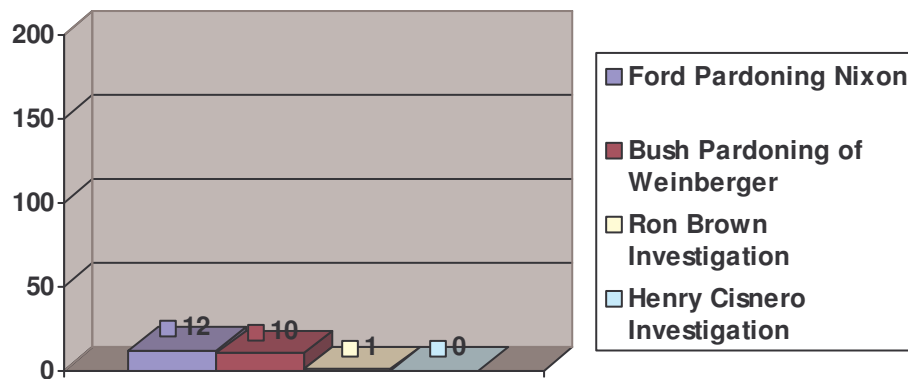


Figure 2 illustrates the number of times each major scandal was located on the front page of the highly circulated newspapers. This figure shows that Watergate was found on the front page of the newspapers more than twice as much as the other scandals studied. The Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky scandals did not seem to have a high number of references on the front page of the newspapers.

One possible explanation for the Monica Lewinsky and Whitewater scandals' low number of references could be the decline in newspaper



readership by 15 percent between 1970's and the 1990's (Newspaper Association of America 2003). In 1970, another possible explanation for the Whitewater scandal's low number of references on the front page could be that the Whitewater scandal was a scandal that was hard to understand, and "infinitely complex," (Williams 1998:63). Also the Whitewater scandal was a scandal that had already been uncovered by the media during President Clinton's campaign and therefore the story might not have been considered front-page news.

Figure 3 illustrates the number of times each minor scandal was located on the front page of the highly circulated newspapers. When comparing Figure 2, major scandals, to Figure 3, minor scandals, it is clear that the major scandals produced more media attention than the minor scandals. As in Figure 2, Figure 3's media attention decreases as time goes on and with each succeeding scandal.

Figure 2 shows that the minor scandal, President Ford's pardon of Nixon, received a relatively large number of references on the front page of the newspapers when compared the other minor scandals. One explanation for this finding could be that President Ford's pardoning of Richard Nixon can be considered to be an extension of the Watergate scandal, which received a largest number of references on the front page of the newspapers. President Ford pardoned Nixon for all possible illegal acts that took place during the Watergate scandal. Therefore while this study considers President Ford's

pardoning of the Richard Nixon to be a separate scandal, Ford's pardoning of Nixon could be considered a part of the Watergate scandal.

Figure 4 illustrates the intensity of the language used when reporting on each major scandal. The major scandals that received the most intense language were the Iran Contra scandal and the Whitewater scandal. The Watergate and the Monica Lewinsky scandal did not receive a large amount of intense language.

The length of the scandal could explain the small amount of intense language uncovered when researching the Watergate and Whitewater scandal when compared to the Iran Contra scandal. The Watergate scandal took place over a span of three years, and the president was not believed to be involved until the last year of the scandal. The Whitewater scandal as was previously mentioned was uncovered and investigated for a number of years. Therefore, it is possible that analyzing the last year of the scandal would have produced more evidence of intense language than in the first four months after the scandal was made public, which is the time period this study analyzed. The Iran Contra Scandal did not take place over years but months and from the beginning of the scandal the President was suspected of involvement, which could explain the large amount of intense language uncovered.

An explanation for the small amount of intense language that the Monica Lewinsky and Whitewater scandals produced could be the previously mentioned explanation of a decrease in the circulation rates of newspapers over time.

Figure 5 shows the intensity of the language used when reporting on each minor scandal. When comparing Figure 4 to Figure 5, the major scandals received more intense language than the minor scandals. The only minor scandal that received comparable intensity of language when compared to the major scandals was President Ford's pardoning of Nixon. This could be for the same reason discussed when comparing Figures 2 and 3, which was that President Ford's pardoning of Nixon could be considered part of the Watergate scandal and thus not a separate scandal.

The comparison between Figures 2 and 3, just as the comparison between Figures 4 and 5, illustrates that during the major scandals media attention was greater and the language was more intense.

These figures also illustrate that media attention decreased over time with each scandal. One explanation for this decrease in media attention over the years could be that the Watergate scandal was the beginning of the nation's "dramatic increase" in political scandals (Williams 1998:3). Furthermore, Watergate created and introduced the government, media and the public to the language that has been used in every political scandal since Watergate, language such as independent counsel and special prosecutor. Therefore, after Watergate each scandal could have been seen as less and less groundbreaking and interesting to the public and the media.

Another possible explanation for the decrease in media attention over time could be the changes that have occurred in the media industry. For example, with the introduction of the 24 hours television news outlets, newspapers in order

to compete for readers needed to not only place the most recent news on the front page but also needed to report news that had not been repeated over and over by the 24-hour news outlets. Therefore stories about political scandals could have been moved to the second or third page, because by the time the newspapers were distributed the story would have been considered old news.

### *Public Opinion*

The research on public opinion revealed that each president's approval rating did drop at least ten percent for three out of the four major scandals. During the Watergate scandal by August 1973, Nixon's rating was at 31% "representing a 36% drop in about six months" (Newport 1998). Throughout the Iran Contra scandal, "Reagan's job approval rating fell from 63% in October 1986 to 47% in December, and ultimately to 43% by March 1987 – representing a 20% decline in about five months" (Newport 1998). During the Whitewater investigation, President Clinton's approval rating dropped from 55% to 44% (Newport 2001). Unlike the other scandals, President Clinton's approval rating during the Monica Lewinsky scandal did not drop; it instead was the highest approval rating of his presidency (The Gallup Poll: 65 Years of Polling).

A possible explanation for President Clinton's job approval rating not dropping as a result of the scandal could be that public did not think that scandal was affecting the president's job performance. It could be that the public was satisfied with the economy, and the state of the nation and therefore did not seem to believe that the scandal was "job-related," (Newport 1999). The high

approval rating of the president could be because the public separated the President's duties as chief executive from his duties as head of state. The public seemed to approve of the way in which President Clinton was running the country but did not approve of the image he had made around the country and the world as the head of state.

In comparison, three out of the four minor scandals did not cause the president's approval ratings to drop at least ten percent. President Ford's pardoning of Richard Nixon was the only minor scandal that did cause the president's approval rating to fall at least ten percent. Negative reaction to the pardon caused President Ford's approval rating to fall 15% (Newport 2001). The remainder of the minor scandals did not affect each president's approval rating.

### *Policy Creation*

The policies that were created as a result of the Watergate scandal are as follows: The Independent Counsel Act, War Powers Act, campaign financing legislation and the Freedom of Information Act (Williams 1998: 32)

There were no policies that were created as a result of the Iran Contra scandal

The policies that were created as a result of the Whitewater scandal are as follows: The Supreme Court ruling in the *Jones vs. Clinton* case set a precedent that allowed the president to be sued while in office (O'Connor, K., J. Herman, 2000: 48). The Supreme Court also set precedent when they ruled

against the use of executive privilege by the White House lawyer when he was asked to turn over Whitewater related notes (Rozell, M. 2000:93).

The policies that were created as a result of the Monica Lewinsky scandal are as follows: The Supreme Court ruled against the argument that President Clinton's Secret Service was protected against testifying under executive privilege. (Rozell, M. 2000:95)

In comparison the minor scandals did not result in the creation of any policies.

A reason why the Iran Contra scandal did not result in policy could be that the policies that were needed to avoid such a scandal were already in place. For example, the National Security Council's job never involved implementing operations. Also the Boland Amendments that were passed by the Congress were enacted in order to prohibit the aid that was funding the Contras. Therefore, the laws and the policies were already in place that would safeguard against a scandal such as the Iran Contra scandal.

### *Major Scandals and Minor Scandals Compared*

By comparing the minor scandals to the major scandals it is clear that the major scandals affected policy creation more than the minor scandals. The major scandals received more media attention than the minor scandals. Also, during the major scandals the approval ratings of the President dropped significantly compared to the minor scandals. Finally more policies were created as a result of the major scandals than the minor scandals.

### *Major Scandals Compared to Model*

Using the minor scandals for comparison, the relationship hypothesized in the model (Figure 1) has been demonstrated through the major scandals. For example the Watergate scandal first received intense media attention, after which an independent counsel was appointed. Next intense media attention continued, the public opinion of the president fell, which encouraged more media coverage, causing the public's opinion of the president to worsen, and as a result policies were created.

The Whitewater scandal also fits the hypothesized model. Intense media surrounded the Whitewater scandal during Bill Clinton's campaign for the presidency and continued when he became president. Due to the mounting media attention and negative public opinion, an independent counsel was appointed and more intense media attention followed, which lead to the creation of policies.

The Iran Contra scandal did not support the hypothesized model. When the Iran Contra scandal broke, there was intense media attention, followed by the appointment of an independent counsel, after which intense media attention continued, yet a policy never resulted from this scandal.

The Monica Lewinsky scandal did not fully support the hypothesized model. Shortly after the Monica Lewinsky scandal was made public, an independent counsel became involved. Intense media attention followed and

policies were then created as a result of this scandal. Yet the president's poll ratings during the scandal did not fall.

Overall the major scandals researched did support the hypothesized model. Although the Iran Contra scandal did not result in a policy creation, and therefore did not support the hypothesized model, three out of the four scandals did support the hypothesized model.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between political scandal and policy change. Using the variables of media attention, public opinion and policy change this study hypothesized that a political scandal could have a significant effect on the world. These results challenge the "no consequence theory" (Thompson 2000:234).

Although the results of the research did not fully support the hypothesis, this study did illustrate that political scandals can have an effect on the world. This study suggests that the relationship between political scandal and policy change does exist. Three out of the four major political scandals studied produced one or more policy changes. These policy changes could be seen as an improvement, and safeguard against the same type of scandals happening again.



## POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

An implication of this study for policy makers is the increased understanding of the effects that political scandals have on policymaking. This study illustrates that political scandals could affect policy change and could be seen as policy windows, which are defined as “opportunities for actions on given initiatives” (Kingdon 2003:166). Policy windows “present themselves and stay open for only short periods of time” (Kingdon 2003:166).

Further research on this subject could be done on the media’s effect on political scandal. This study focused on newspapers and did not include televised news reports of each scandal. Introducing those findings could provide interesting insights to the media’s effects on scandal and policy creation.

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